

Chama nonprofit helps veterans through horseback riding and fly fishing

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If fresh air and physical activity are the best prescription for well being, then [Healing America's Heroes](#) (HAH) should indeed heal the veterans who enroll in its free fly fishing and horseback riding programs. For three years now, the Chama-based nonprofit has hosted week-long summer courses for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), military sexual trauma (MST), and traumatic brain injury (TBI).

"We assist military vets—both female and male—through equine and piscatorial therapy," explains founder and U.S. Army veteran Eddie Crain, noting that the fishing part of the programs also includes fly tying, rod building, and learning fishing techniques. "To this day, we've helped 46 veterans through our programs."

The most recent group was a class of six women who attended a program from June 25–30; the next men’s program takes place July 17–21. “We lease a bed and breakfast,” Crain explains. “A cook stays with us, and all meals are provided.” Participants spend their days on horseback or fishing in two well-stocked private ponds (the Rio Chama is currently too high for good fishing). Through such recreational activities, participants develop problem-solving skills, interpersonal skills, leisure skills, and self confidence.

“Horses are therapeutic in many ways,” Crain says, noting that vets are assigned horses and must care for them every day, which instills a sense of responsibility. When vets ride, they do exercises to engage both sides of the brain and also work on balance. Likewise, fly fishing is a mentally challenging sport in a soothing, natural environment. And who doesn’t enjoy a good fish fry afterward?



Fly fishing is relaxing and easy to learn.

According to Crain, the serenity, weather, and scenery of northern Rio Arriba County provide an excellent backdrop for the HAH programs. “There are also a lot of Korean and World War II vets who own ranches in this area,” he says. Many local veterans have donated their time, money, or equipment (such as horses and hay) to the programs.

Crain hopes that—through even more volunteers and donations—he can increase the number of HAH programs per year, especially during the holiday season. “PTSD typically kicks in and hits the hardest during Thanksgiving and Christmas,” he says.

Volunteers are also needed immediately for the men’s program in July. To volunteer, visit the [HAH website](#) to apply, or connect with the LANL Veterans’ Committee.



Healing America's Heroes has a dozen horses for veterans to ride.

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